

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: THE POWELL QUESTION

BEGIN SUMMARY: ENOCH POWELL'S ANNOUNCEMENT LAST WEEK THAT HE WOULD NOT CONTEST HIS WOLVERHAMPTON PARLIAMENTARY SEAT IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION PREDICTABLY SET OFF A SPATE OF SPECULATION ABOUT (1) HIS INTENTIONS AND (2) THE EFFECT OF HIS ACTION ON THE TORY ELECTION PROSPECTS. CONSERVATIVE PARTY OFFICIALS DO NOT APPEAR WORRIED ABOUT HIS ACTION, BUT CONCEDE THAT HIS VOTE-GETTING POWER IN SOME MIDLAND CONSTITUENCIES COULD BE MISSED IN A CLOSE CONTEST. END SUMMARY.

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1. SINCE PARLIAMENT DISSOLVED, POWELL HAS LAIN LOW

REFUSING TO COMMENT ON HIS RESIGNATION. POWELL HAS OFTEN BEEN DESCRIBED AS ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST INTELLIGENT AND CHARISMATIC POLITICAL FIGURES. AT SIXTY-ONE HE APPEARS TO HAVE CONSIDERABLE ENERGY, HIS HEALTH IS REPORTEDLY GOOD AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT HIS AMBITION TO LEAD THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS FLAGGED. HIS PREVIOUS BID FOR THIS LEADERSHIP, HIS CONTINUING FEUD WITH EDWARD HEATH AND OTHERS IN CONTROL OF THE PARTY'S POLICY AND APPARATUS, AND HIS FREQUENT AND BITTER CRITICISMS OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICIES DO NOT SUGGEST A MAN WHO HAS GIVEN UP THE GAME. ON THIS ASSUMPTION, THE FAVORED ASSESSMENT OF HIS INTENTIONS IS THE WOLVERHAMPTON-LES-DEUX- EGLISES ONE: POWELL HAS DISSOCIATED HIMSELF FROM THE PRESENT PARTY LEADERSHIP AND POLICIES WITH A VIEW TO WAITING IN THE WINGS FOR THE PARTY TO CALL HIM TO LEAD IT IN DEFEAT. A COROLLARY OF THIS THEORY IS THAT POWELL BELIEVES (THE PARTY EMPHATICALLY DOES NOT) THAT HIS FOLLOWING MADE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TORY VICTORY AND DEFEAT IN 1970, AND THAT IT WILL AGAIN. THIS TIME, IN DEFEAT, A SOBERED, REPENTANT PARTY WILL RECALL THE PROPHET FROM THE WILDERNESS AND RESTORE HIM TO HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE OF HONOR.

2. POWELL'S PARTY STRENGTH HAS NOT BEEN BASED ON A FOLLOWING EITHER IN PARLIAMENT OR IN THE CONSERVATIVE CENTRAL OFFICE. RATHER, IT APPEARS TO HAVE RESTED ON A COMBINATION OF WORKING AND MIDDLE-CLASS SUPPORT IN THE INDUSTRIAL MIDLANDS--POWELL TERRITORY. SOME EXPERIENCED POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT WHILE POWELL HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF SOME STRENGTH IN THE MIDLANDS, HE HAS LOST THE PARTY VOTES IN AREAS SUCH AS CENTRAL LONDON. POWELL'S TORY CRITICS SAY THAT HIS FUNDAMENTALIST ECONOMIC APPROACH IS MORE THE MARK OF A TRADITIONAL MANCHESTER LIBERAL THAN THAT OF A TRUE--THEREFORE FLEXIBLE--TORY. FURTHER, TRUE TORIES ARE SUPPOSED TO BEHAVE LOYALLY TOWARD THE PARTY LEADERSHIP OF THE DAY AND THERE IS NO DENYING POWELL HAS BEEN A THORN IN THE PARTY'S SIDE. HOWEVER THIS MAY BE, THE FACT REMAINS THAT POWELL'S VOICE AND HIS PARTICULAR BRAND OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM (AN IMPERIALIST TURNED LITTLE ENGLANDER) FIND RESONANCE IN A SUBSTANTIAL BODY OF BRITISH POPULATION. IN PARTICULAR,

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POWELL'S ANTI-COMMON MARKET RHETORIC COULD HELP THE LABOR PARTY MAKE BRITAIN'S EC MEMBERSHIP MORE OF AN ELECTION ISSUE THAN NOW SEEMS TO BE THE CASE.

3. DESPITE HIS POTENTIAL AS A TROUBLEMAKER, WE HAVE NOT DETECTED ANY PARTICULAR CONCERN ABOUT EITHER A NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE IMPACT HE MIGHT HAVE ON THE ELECTION AMONG OFFICIALS AT CONSERVATIVE CENTRAL OFFICE. WE UNDERSTAND

THAT THIS IS NOT EQUALLY TRUE OF SOME PARTY PROS IN A
NUMBER OF IMPORTANT MARGINAL MIDLANDS CONSTITUENCIES WHO
FEAR THAT WITHOUT HIS DRAWING POWER, THE POWELL VOTE
COULD COST THE PARTY SOME SEATS IN A CLOSE ELECTION.

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